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MILITARY ADDRESSEES ALSO FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ECON, MPOL, FR
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GISCARD'S MARCH FIRESIDE CHAT

REF: (A) PARIS 25410 OF 1974; (B) PARIS A-125

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING'S MARCH 25
TELEVISED FIRESIDE CHAT PRODUCED NO SURPRISES. BILLED
AS A REVIEW OF FRENCH "SECURITY" -- EXTERNAL, ECONOMIC,
AND PERSONAL -- THE TWENTY-THREE MINUTE SPEECH FOCUSED
PRIMARILY ON DEFENSE. GISCARD REAFFIRMED THE
BASICALLY GAULLIST STRATEGY OF PRESERVING AN INDEPEN-
DENT DEFENSE POSTURE WITHIN THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE. HE
UNDERLINED THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING A NUCLEAR
FORCE, REJECTED THE IDEA OF AN ALL-PROFESSIONAL ARMY IN
FAVOR OF PRESERVING A TWELVE-MONTH TERM OF SERVICE FOR
DRAFTEES, AND HINTED AT COMING REFORMS IN THE CONDITIONS
OF MILITARY SERVICE. HE STRESSED THE NEED TO IMPROVE
FRANCE'S CONVENTIONAL FORCES. TOUCHING LIGHTLY ON
ECONOMIC MATTERS, HE ASSERTED THAT FRANCE IS WINNING
THE WAR AGAINST INFLATION AND RESTATED HIS GOVERNMENT'S
INTENTION TO MAINTAIN ECONOMIC GROWTH IN 1975. FINALLY,
HE CALLED UPON FRENCHMEN TO OBEY THE LAW, ILLUSTRATING
THE POINT BY SAYING THE MEASURED APPLICATION OF THE
ABORTION REFORM LAW WILL BE RESPECTED. END SUMMARY.

1. DEFENSE STRATEGY: IN EMPHASIZING CONTINUITY IN
FRENCH DEFENSE POLICY BY UNDERSCORING THE NECESSITY FOR
AN "INDEPENDENT" DEFENSE, GISCARD FOLLOWS THE PATH
BLAZED BY DE GAULLE. THIS IS CERTAIN TO PLEASE AND
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REASSURE THE UDR, SOME OF WHOSE MEMBERS HAVE BEEN
UNEASY AT WHAT THEY SAW AS THE RISK OF A GOF EVOLUTION
TOWARD ATLANTICISM. GISCARD DESCRIBED FRANCE AS A
PACIFIC COUNTRY WITHOUT TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS AND AT
THE SAME TIME A COUNTRY WHICH MUST LIVE BETWEEN TWO
RIVAL, NUCLEAR-ARMED SUPERPOWERS IN A WORLD INCREASING-
LY VIOLENT. THERE IS THE RISK OF WAR IN THE MIDDLE
EAST AND DISORDERS HAVE EVEN APPROACHED EUROPE. THESE

REALITIES POSE A SECURITY PROBLEM FOR FRANCE. "I HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS PROBLEM FOR A LONG TIME," SAID GISCARD, "AND I HAVE REACHED THE CONCLUSION WHICH WAS THAT OF GENERAL DE GAULLE AND WHICH IS THAT FRANCE MUST HAVE AN INDEPENDENT DEFENSE. FRANCE IS PART OF AN ALLIANCE, BUT IT MUST ASSURE ITS DEFENSE IN AN INDEPENDENT MANNER." IN AN APPARENT REBUFF TO FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY CRITICS WHO HAVE CALLED FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE FORCE DE DISSUASION, GISCARD DISMISSED THE "STUPID IDEA" THAT FRANCE COULD HAVE AN INDEPENDENT DEFENSE WITHOUT NUCLEAR ARMAMENTS. CALLING FRANCE THE "THIRD NUCLEAR POWER" (THE ADVANCE TEXT HAD GISCARD SAYING "WE ARE THE THIRD NUCLEAR SUPERPOWER" -- THIS WAS FLAGGED ERRONEOUSLY IN SOME EARLY PRESS ACCOUNTS), HE SAID THAT FRENCH NUCLEAR ARMS WOULD FORCE A WOULD-BE AGGRESSOR TO RISK NUCLEAR CONFLICT, AND SUCH A DETERRENT IS THE MOST EFFICIENT AND PROVEN MEANS OF DEFENSE.

2. CONVENTIONAL FORCES: IN LINE WITH EARLIER PRONOUNCEMENTS (REF A), GISCARD SEEMED TO SUGGEST THAT NEW EMPHASIS WOULD BE PLACED ON DEVELOPING FRANCE'S

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CONVENTIONAL FORCES. HE NOTED THAT IN A WORLD OF FAST-BREAKING CRISES, FRANCE NEEDED MOBILE LAND, SEA, AND AIR FORCES, READY TO ACT WHERE NEEDED: "UNTIL THE PRESENT TIME -- PROBABLY A HERITAGE OF THE COLD WAR -- THE FRENCH MILITARY PLAN HAD BEEN DEPLOYED TOWARD THE EAST, BUT I THINK THAT TODAY, THE DANGERS IN THE WORLD ARE THE DANGERS WHICH CAN COME ABOUT IN DIVERSE ZONES OF THE WORLD, AND OUR MILITARY FORCES MUST BE MOBILE FORCES."

3. THE DRAFT AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE: ADDRESSING HIMSELF TO THE ONGOING DEBATE IN FRANCE ON THE FUTURE OF CONSCRIPTION AND REFORMS IN THE CONDITIONS OF

MILITARY SERVICE (REF B), GISCARD AFFIRMED THAT FRANCE WOULD RETAIN THE DRAFT AND FOR THE PRESENT A 12-MONTH PERIOD OF SERVICE FOR CONSCRIPTS. AFTER REVIEWING THE LENGTHS OF MILITARY SERVICE FOR DRAFTEES IN SEVEN OTHER EUROPEAN STATES (BUT CONVENIENTLY OMITTING THE UK, WHICH HAS NO CONSCRIPTION), GISCARD CONCLUDED THAT FRANCE'S TWELVE-MONTH REQUIREMENT CORRESPONDS TO THE MINIMUM DEMANDS OF COMPARABLE COUNTRIES. GISCARD WENT ON TO SAY THAT CONDITIONS OF SERVICE MUST BE ADAPTED TO THE NEW CONDITIONS OF LIFE OF YOUNG FRENCHMEN, AND "IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO ADAPT THE CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLINE AND COMMAND TO THE NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL AND HIERARCHIAL RELATIONS IN FRANCE." THE DRAFT ITSELF IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THIS PROCESS, HE ADDED, AS IT PERMITS DIVERSE YOUNG FRENCHMEN TO KNOW EACH OTHER.

4. THE ECONOMY: GISCARD RATHER GRANDLY ANNOUNCED THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FRANCE IS WINNING "THE BATTLE AGAINST INFLATION" BY KEEPING THE 1975 INFLATION RATE UNDER 10 PERCENT, A FIGURE WHICH IS NOT NEW AND IN FACT REPRESENTS A RETREAT FROM MORE OPTIMISTIC ESTIMATES MADE LAST YEAR. HE PROMISED CONTINUED GROWTH (AT AN UNSPECIFIED RATE) OF THE FRENCH ECONOMY. WHILE RULING OUT STIMULATION OF THE ECONOMY THROUGH INCREASED CONSUMPTION, HE CRYPTICALLY ANNOUNCED THAT IN APRIL HIS FINANCE MINISTER WOULD CONSULT WITH BOTH STATE-OWNED AND PRIVATE INDUSTRY "TO SEE HOW CURRENT INVESTMENT PLANS CAN BE MAINTAINED OR EXPANDED." ADMINISTERING A VERBAL BALM TO BUSINESS ANXIETIES, GISCARD SKIPPED OVER THE HARD PROBLEM OF GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT.

5. LAW AND ORDER: THE FINAL MOMENTS OF GISCARD'S SPEECH TOUCHED (ALMOST AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT) ON "SECURITY OF PERSONS." GISCARD SIMPLY CALLED UPON FRENCHMEN TO OBEY THE LAW. HE CITED AS THE SOLE EXAMPLE THE RECENTLY-PASSED LAW LIBERALIZING ABORTION IN FRANCE. GISCARD NOTED THAT IT TOOK TIME TO IMPLEMENT THE CONDITIONS OF THE ORDINANCE AND PREPARE PROPER FACILITIES; HE SAID THAT HE HAD INSTRUCTED HIS MINISTER OF HEALTH TO ACCELERATE THESE PREPARATIONS SO THAT THE NEW PROCEDURES COULD GO INTO FORCE AT THE END OF APRIL -- TWO MONTHS EARLIER THAN SCHEDULED. (GISCARD APPARENTLY WAS OBLIQUELY REFERRING TO A RECENT BIZARRE INCIDENT WHERE A NUMBER OF MILITANTS -- INCLUDING DOCTORS AND PREGNANT WOMEN -- FORCED THEIR WAY INTO A PARIS HOSPITAL DEMANDING ABORTIONS AND ACTUALLY PERFORMED SOME UNAUTHORIZED ABORTIONS BEFORE BEING EJECTED.)

6. COMMENT: GISCARD'S MONTHLY FIRESIDE CHATS, WITH
THEIR UNFAILING EMPHASIS ON THE POSITIVE, ARE MAINLY FOR

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DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSUMPTION AND ARE CLEARLY NOT THE FORUM FROM WHICH HE PLANS TO ANNOUNCE NEW DEPARTURES IN FRENCH POLICY. HIS MARCH ADDRESS FOLLOWED THE PATTERN. THE DEFENSE PORTION WAS GAULLIST ORTHODOXY IN NEW BUTTON-DOWN DRESS; DE GAULLE'S FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND DEFENSE MINISTER MICHEL DEBRE SAID AFTER THE TELECAST THAT HE ARGUED THE SAME POLICIES IN 1960. GISCARD'S INTENTION TO RETAIN THE TWELVE-MONTH COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE, HIS SUGGESTION OF UNSPECIFIED REFORMS IN THE CONDITIONS OF SERVICE, AND HINT OF UPGRADING FRENCH CONVENTIONAL FORCES MERELY AFFIRMED WHAT HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN SAYING IN PAST MONTHS. HE DID NOT CLARIFY, HOWEVER, THE AMBIGUITIES CONCERNING THE FUTURE USE OF THESE "IMPROVED" CONVENTIONAL FORCES. THE UNCERTAINTIES DESCRIBED IN REF B, PARAGRAPH 4 REMAIN, ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT GISCARD WANTS TO BUILD MORE OPTIONS FOR THE USE OF FRANCE'S CONVENTIONAL FORCES -- IN EUROPE AND ELSEWHERE. GIVEN THE DECIDEDLY DOMESTIC TARGET FOR HIS REMARKS ON DEFENSE, WE ADD CAUTION THAT ONE SHOULD NOT INTERPRET GISCARD'S WORDS AS EVIDENCE THAT HIS EVOLVING DEFENSE POLICY WILL BE NO DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF DE GAULLE AND POMPIDOU. WE ALREADY HAVE EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THE NATURE OF THE "CHANGE WITHOUT RISK" THAT HE HOPES TO BRING TO THIS SUBJECT. BUT HE IS UNLIKELY TO USE "FIRESIDE CHATS" AS HIS VEHICLE FOR THESE CHANGES.

7. SINCE THESE MONTHLY FIRESIDE CHATS ARE DESIGNED TO REASSURE THE WORRIED PROVINCIALS, TO KEEP GISCARD'S DOMINANCE OF THE NEWS, AND TO DEMONSTRATE THAT NO
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POPULAR CONCERN IS BEING IGNORED, WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL ABOUT EXTRACTING ANY MAJOR POLICY CONCLUSIONS FROM THEM. INVETERATE CABINET-WATCHERS WILL NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT WHILE GISCARD REFERRED TO HIS FORTHCOMING VISIT TO THE USSR IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS DISCUSSION OF FRANCE'S PURSUIT OF DETENTE, HE POINTEDLY FAILED TO MENTION CHIRAC' WHO RETURNED JUST THE DAY BEFORE FROM THE FIRST USSR VISIT BY A FRENCH PRIME MINISTER SINCE 1967. END COMMENT.

8. POUCHING TEXT TO EUR/WE.
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